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Six months later

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New evidence clouds Paisley 'suicide' verdict

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Washington—Six months after the body of a former CIA nuclear weapons expert, John Arthur Paisley, was found floating in the Chesapeake Bay, new evidence, together with misleading statements about Mr. Paisley's role with the government, tend to cast doubt on investigators' verdict of "apparent suicide" in the case.

This evidence includes a firsthand account by a United States coast guardsman who says that he saw an opened package of lunch meat, a container of mustard and a knife smeared with mustard lying on a sink-top counter in the Brillig, Mr. Paisley's 34-foot sloop.

In addition to the food, the coast guardsman, who requested his identity not be revealed, said he saw a sailing chart, located near the sloop's wheel, on which a sailing course had been partially mapped out, as well as a life preserver that had been left alongside.

"It looked to me like he had been interrupted in the middle of lunch," said the coast guardsman. "It looked like he had filled in part of the chart and then had decided to get something to eat. So he took off his life preserver and went below, down to the galley."

The witness was one of two guardsmen who were the first people to board the deserted Brillig a few hours after it was found washed ashore at Point Lookin, near the mouth of the Potomac River in St. Marys county, last September 23.

In addition to this account, a three-month Sun investigation has produced new evidence that indicates a struggle may have taken place aboard the Brillig in the hours before Mr. Paisley's disappearance.

That evidence includes a statement by Mr. Paisley's widow, Maryann, who visited the sloop soon after it was found and who said that "a table had been pulled away from the wall. Several screws had been pulled loose, and it was tilted at an angle which would have made it impossible to use." Mr. Paisley, according to several sources, was writing a report during his final sailing excursion, and the table was the only adequate writing surface aboard.

JOHN ARTHUR PAISLEY
...body found in bay

The Maryland State Police, whose investigation concluded that Mr. Paisley's death was an "apparent suicide," earlier said that one witness—an intelligence colleague of his who has since left for Australia—told them the table had been pulled loose from the wall months before the Central Intelligence Agency analyst's disappearance.

But another witness interviewed by

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New evidence, suspect statements cloud 'suicide' verdict on Paisley

PAISLEY, from A1

The Sun—a young woman who was a guest aboard the Brillig one week before Mr. Paisley vanished—recalls that meals were served on the same table during her stay aboard.

"The table was working during our sailing trip, we had it up for meals and I also remember it folded up against the wall," said the guest.

In addition to these accounts, no fewer than six high-level government sources—at least one of whom worked directly with Mr. Paisley on top-secret projects—have told The Sun that, at the time of his death, Mr. Paisley—who had been described by the CIA as a "part-time consultant with a very limited access to classified information"—actually was engaged in analyzing extremely sensitive, top-secret documents dealing with American assessments of Soviet nuclear capability.

"I found the initial reports [after Mr. Paisley's death] that Paisley had only limited access to classified documents shocking," said a former, high-level staffer on the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board (PFIAB) who had earlier worked closely with Mr. Paisley on projects involving top-secret, CIA estimates of Soviet weaponry. "In fact, I was surprised that the agency would even try to pander that sort of information.

"There is no question that Paisley, at the time of his death, had access to highly classified intelligence information."

The former PFIAB staff member said that Mr. Paisley, who had served as CIA deputy director of the Office of Strategic Research until his official retirement from the agency in 1974, had continued to work on top-secret projects as a $200-a-day consultant until he disappeared on the night of September 24-25, 1978.

"Paisley was involved, all along, in highly sensitive estimates of Soviet capability," said the ex-PFIAB official. "And this wasn't academic, outside stuff, it would have been the nitty-gritty."

Intelligence sources, both inside and outside the CIA, meanwhile, contend that the agency misled news gatherers about the nature of Mr. Paisley's work at the time of his disappearance. "The agency is flat-out lying," said one source. "Paisley was never not involved in something big."

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Mr. Paisley's death was ruled an apparent suicide by the Maryland State Police—the only governmental agency that so far has investigated the case—a few weeks after the badly decomposed body of the 55-year-old weapons analyst was pulled from the Chesapeake Bay, about 2 miles southeast of the Patuxent River October 1.

The victim, shot once behind the left ear with a 9-millimeter pistol, was found with two belts containing 38 pounds of diving weights attached to his waist.

The State Police, who entered the case soon after the body was found, identified the body as Mr. Paisley's on the basis of dental records and fingerprints.

But the State Police investigation was marred by several anomalies and inconsistencies of fact:

• Both the FBI and the CIA were unable to locate a set of Mr. Paisley's fingerprints for more than a week after the discovery of the body. ("Frankly, that strikes me as incredible," one high-level member of the intelligence community later remarked. "I've worked for some of these agencies, myself, and I know for a fact that every time you get a new clearance for classified information, they take your prints again. In fact, it got to be a pain in the neck. Every time you turned around, it was time to take your fingerprints. They must have had a dozen sets of Paisley's prints.")

At the time Paisley's body surfaced, however, both the FBI and the CIA said that his fingerprints had been "lost." The fingerprint identification was not made until about a week after the discovery of the body. The FBI said that the prints had been misfiled; the only available set of prints had been filed under the name of "Jack" Paisley and had been taken when the weapons expert was 17 years old.

• The shooting death took place in the absence of witnesses, and the body, which was decomposed beyond recognition, was cremated in a CIA-approved funeral home without ever having been observed by anyone who knew Mr. Paisley.

• Both Mr. Paisley's boat and his Washington apartment were searched by CIA representatives soon after the discovery of the body. By the time the State Police came on the scene (after the body was found) the original evidence had been contaminated.

• No traces of blood or brain fragments were found aboard the Brillig. Thus, the suicide verdict requires one to believe that Mr. Paisley either shot himself while standing on the edge of the boat (so that the shell casing, the pistol, and the blood and brain fragments fell overboard with him), or that he shot himself while in the water and while wearing 38 pounds of diving weights.

• When the deserted boat was discovered, the wheel was unlocked and the ship-to-shore radio was still playing. Mr. Paisley's widow, who says that she sailed for years with her husband, insists that he was a meticulous sailor who would never have left these chores unattended. "Even if he had been under emotional duress, he would have locked that wheel by instinct."

• The first people to be contacted after the discovery of the Brillig were officials at the CIA and at the Washington accounting firm of Coopers and Lybrand, where Mr. Paisley had been working as an administrative aide for about six months. The accounting firm, headed by K. Wayne Smith, a former Defense Department weapons expert who has served on the National Security Council and who has performed weapons-analysis work for both the Pentagon and the Rand Corporation, immediately dispatched one of its employees to Mr. Paisley's apartment, No. 847, at 1500 Massachusetts avenue, N.W.

After being admitted by the landlady, the employee searched the apartment and took away a Rollodex telephone book that contained numbers listed by Mr. Paisley.

The CIA, meanwhile, sent representatives to both the Brillig and the apartment; they confiscated a briefcase full of papers that they found aboard the boat and examined other papers located in the apartment.

All of these steps were taken before Mr. Paisley's family—he had two grown children, in addition to his estranged wife, Maryann—was notified that the boat had been found. Mrs. Paisley says she was not contacted until about 11 P.M. (the boat was discovered around 11 A.M.).

• Mr. Paisley's girlfriend, Betty Myers, reported in the days immediately following the discovery of the body, that he had earlier sold the 9-millimeter pistol that he kept aboard his boat. (The State Police decided that she had misunderstood Mr. Paisley, however—that he had attempted to sell the gun, but actually had failed to find a buyer.)

• Mr. Paisley's wife (the couple had been separated for about two years prior to the disappearance) and several other people who knew him well insist that he was in good spirits just before his disappearance. "He called me up that weekend," said Mrs. Paisley in a later interview. "He said that he was thinking about going sailing—but that if he didn't, we'd have dinner together.

"My feeling is that something very sinister is happening. From the beginning, I've thought that I was up against something I couldn't do alone. John was an ethical man—he would never do this [commit suicide without an explanation] to his children.

"My own feeling is that if I drop this [her own private investigation—she recently hired Washington attorney Bernard Fensterwald for this purpose], I will be letting him down."

Most of the questions about Mr. Paisley's disappearance have focused, in recent months, on his participation in an extremely sensitive and controversial 1976 intelligence project, known as the "Team A-Team B Experiment."

That experiment was launched after White House experts on the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board convinced CIA officials that the agency's yearly evaluations of Soviet military capability should be tested by comparing them with evaluations made by experts outside the CIA.

After agreeing reluctantly to the proposal, early in 1976 the CIA named Mr. Paisley to serve as coordinator between the agency's A Team—its own, "in-house" weapons-analysis group—and the B Team, which was composed of three different groups of outside experts and which was chaired by Richard Pipes, head of Harvard University's Russian Institute.

"It was Paisley who developed the list of people who would serve on the B Team," says a former PFIAB White House staffer. "It was his job to get these guys clearances . . . to discuss their backgrounds with us. Then, after the team had been selected, he would schedule the briefings. He shaped the entire process. He made the arrangements for CIA couriers to bring classified information from the A Team to the B Team.

"And he liked that work. He was really enthusiastic. When I first met him, in the early going, he used to talk all the time about getting back to his sailboat and doing more sailing. It seemed at times like his work was interfering with his sailing. But then later he really got into it, and he worked like hell on it."

When the B Team finally released its report, however, Mr. Paisley found himself caught up in a swirling controversy. For one thing, the report was—at least in part—highly critical of the CIA's in-house evaluations (the "National Intelligence Estimates") of the Soviet military threat.

For another thing, the experiment had been compromised by serious leaks to the press of some of the classified information that had been fed—by Mr. Paisley and his aides—to the B Team.

The controversy was further heightened by its timing, occurring as it did while the U.S. government was in the middle of preparing its negotiating position for the strategic arms limitation talks (SALT II) with the Soviet Union.

At the time of his death Mr. Paisley had been engaged in writing a "retrospective analysis" of the 1976 B Team experiment for an in-house CIA publication.

His report, according to intelligence sources, was to have focused on the recruiting methods and organizational procedures used during the experiment. Presumably, it also would have discussed the damaging leaks to the press.

But that report was never completed. The papers that were found in the briefcase aboard the Brillig contained Mr. Paisley's scrawled notes on the history of the project.

The high-level intelligence sources interviewed by The Sun strongly doubt that Mr. Paisley could have been killed because of his involvement in the B Team project. They point out that disagreements between different elements in the American intelligence community form a routine part of the process of analyzing military intelligence.

But these sources do not discount the possibility that Mr. Paisley might have been killed because he discovered a source of intelligence leaks to the Soviet Union or because he might himself have been involved in such leaks.

In assessing such possibilities, one former high-level staffer at PFIAB suggests a complicated, intriguing scenario—one that illustrates, compellingly, the difficulties involved in attempting to unravel incidents like the one involving John Paisley and the CIA.

First, the ex-PFIAB staffer points out that the disappearance of John Paisley coincided with the start of a trial in Newark, N.J., in which two Soviet agents, Valdik A. Enger and Rudolf P. Chernyayev, were convicted and sentenced to 50 years in prison for attempting to buy antisubmarine secrets from a naval officer. The defense alleged in the trial that the naval officer, Lt. Cmdr. Arthur Lindberg, was planted by the FBI in an attempt to trap the Russian agents in an espionage offense.

"Look at it this way," says the former staff member. "the KGB has just gotten lured into this set-up; they've gotten trapped.

"And now, here comes John Paisley. He's just left his job at the agency in 1974, and he's left it on a low [illegible] a lot of people were blaming his department for the underestimates of Soviet military strength up until then.

"So he's depressed. In addition, he's in the middle of an ugly divorce. . . . Now, here's a man who speaks fluent Russian . . . who loves Russian music, Russian food. . . . And he moves into that apartment house on Mass. avenue—an apartment house where there are already eight Russians, employees from the Soviet Embassy, living. . . .

"It's another set-up. They've got to figure that the agency is 'trolling' John Paisley as a likely double-agent, a man who might be willing to betray his colleagues. the guy . . . [illegible] into another trap.

"And so they decide to teach the agency a lesson. They decide to make it very clear that if the CIA wants to play this game, they're going to have to pay a high price for it."

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